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Leveraging U.S. Funding: The Stunning Global Impact of Nutrition and Supplements during the First 1,000 Days

*Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,
Global Human Rights and Int'l Organizations
Excerpts of Remarks
Chairman Chris Smith (NJ-04)
June 9, 2016*

Good afternoon. We are here today to examine the Global Impact of Nutrition and Supplements During the First 1000 Days of Life – a period from conception to roughly age two – and how we can leverage U.S. taxpayer funds to achieve maximum results.

As you know, this subcommittee has played a key role in advocating for an enhanced focus on food security. For the past two Congresses I have been working on authorizing legislation for our flagship nutrition and food security program, Feed the Future. I authored the Global Food Security Act of 2015, H.R. 1567, which passed the House in April, as did its predecessor bill in the last Congress, thanks in large part to the leadership of Majority Leader McCarthy. Today's program also follows upon a hearing we did during the latter part of 2015 on "Food Security and Nutrition Programs in Africa," which highlighted the role a number of implementers are playing on the ground, as well as a hearing we held in the last Congress on the first 1000 Days.

For this afternoon's program we will step back and take a look at the role played not only by the US government but also the United Nations. Thus we will be hearing from USAID's Assistant to the Administrator Beth Dunford who will relay to us some remarkable results that the USAID-led Feed the Future initiative has achieved in reducing stunting by emphasizing those first 1000 days, and the implication of those results for developing nations that are seeking to grow not only their human capital but also their economies.

We will first, however, be briefed by Ajay Markanday of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Part of our ability to leverage U.S. funds depends on other partners who play a role in enhancing food security throughout the globe, and none is more important in this regard than the FAO.

I also want to highlight a statement by Mr. Markanday, as it underscores a key point of today's hearing: "The rationale for supporting proper nutrition is not simply a moral imperative but also economic: it has been long established that malnutrition undermines economic growth and perpetuates poverty."

Indeed, there is perhaps no wiser investment that we could make not only in the human person but also the economies of the developing world than to concentrate on ensuring that sufficient nutrition and health assistance is given during the first one thousand days of life.

Children who do not receive adequate nutrition *in utero* are more likely to experience lifelong cognitive and physical deficiencies due in particular to stunting. UNICEF estimates that one in four children worldwide is stunted due to lack of adequate nutrition.

The African Union Commission Cost of Hunger in Africa study estimated that the economic costs associated with child undernutrition are substantial--from 2% to 16% of the gross national product (GNP) in several African nations. For instance, this cost was estimated at US \$4.7 billion in Ethiopia in 2009 alone, which is the equivalent of 16 percent of Ethiopia's GNP.

Conversely, by helping women throughout pregnancy receive adequate nutrition and supplemental micronutrients – such as iodine, Vitamin A and folic acid – and ensuring that they are well-fed while nursing, children and mothers thrive.

To give one example, studies indicate that if we provide women of childbearing years with the recommended dose of folic acid during the three months prior to pregnancy and during the first month of pregnancy, the risk of Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD, is reduced by a whopping 40 percent.

We do look forward to hearing some of the results that USAID has been able to accomplish with regard to reducing stunting, attributable to the Feed the Future Program.

It is also my hope that as we look now to the next Administration, that we will be able to enshrine food security and nutrition as a firmly-planted cornerstone of U.S. policy. Consider how President Bush, beginning in 2002, had the initial foresight to elevate the important role of food security in U.S. foreign policy, especially in Africa, via the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA), which was funded through development assistance and implemented through USAID. At the same time, the Millennium Challenge Corporation began making substantial investments in agriculture-led economic growth programs, particularly in Africa.

This is a policy course that President Obama has continued and built upon, with the Feed the Future initiative, instituted at the G8 Meeting in L'Aquila, Italy, in 2009, when the countries of the world came together to ensure that we cultivate resiliency in food insecure countries so that they can withstand the next food crisis, such as we saw in 2007-2008 – a crisis that Beth Dunford was on the front lines battling.

It is my hope that the next Administration, whomever the President may be, will build upon this, and continue that focus. For by addressing nutrition during the first 1000 days of life, we help ensure that the next 25,000 days – or whatever the number is that our Creator has allotted – are filled with good health.